

Message Text

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DRAFTED BY EUR/P:MWJERABEK/VRM
APPROVED BY M:LEAGLEBURGER
EUR:A.A. HARTMAN
S/S - MR. BRIDGES

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P 240019Z JUL 76
FM SECSTATE WASHDC
TO AMEMBASSY BELGRADE PRIORITY

UNCLAS STATE 183485

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR, CASC, YO (TOTH, LASZLO)

SUBJECT: TOTH CASE

FOLLOWING ARE EXCERPTS FROM THE NOON BRIEFING, JULY 23,
ON SUBJECT CASE:

QUOTE

Q: IN BELGRADE THE YUGOSLAVS RELEASED LASZLO TOTH, A
YUGOSLAV-BORN AMERICAN, FROM PRISON. ONE, DO YOU HAVE ANY
COMMENT ON THAT? TWO, DO YOU HAVE ANY COMMENT ON THE
REMARKS BY OUR AMBASSADOR, LAWRENCE SILBERMAN, WHO SAID HE
WAS CRITICIZED BY THE EASTERN EUROPEAN SECTION OF THIS
DEPARTMENT FOR HIS EFFORTS TO FREE TOTH. HE QUOTES THE
EASTERN EUROPEAN SECTION AS SAYING, "I WAS BEING UNDIPLO-
MATIC FOR PRESSING THE CASE."

A: I DO HAVE SOMETHING TO SAY ON THAT. I WILL TAKE YOUR
SECOND QUESTION FIRST, IF I MAY. NO, IT IS NOT TRUE
THAT AMBASSADOR SILBERMAN WAS REPRIMANDED AT ALL. THERE
WAS NEVER ANY QUESTION OF REPRIMANDING THE AMBASSADOR.
AMBASSADOR SILBERMAN HAS DONE AN EXCELLENT JOB IN KEEPING
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THE TOTH CASE BEFORE THE GOVERNMENT OF YUGOSLAVIA AND
IN FINALLY SECURING THE RELEASE OF MR. TOTH.

NOW, I THINK THE MAIN POINT TO BEAR IN MIND IS THAT ALL

CONCERNED OFFICES AND OFFICERS OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT HAVE BEEN ACTIVELY AND CONTINUOUSLY INVOLVED IN THE EFFORTS OF THE GOVERNMENT AND OF THE EMBASSY IN BELGRADE TO SECURE MR. TOTH'S RELEASE.

I'LL JUST MENTION A COUPLE OF THINGS. ON MORE THAN FORTY SEPARATE OCCASIONS, SENIOR U.S. OFFICIALS, INCLUDING AMBASSADOR SILBERMAN, DEPUTY SECRETARIES INGERSOLL AND ROBINSON, COUNSELLOR SONNENFELDT, AND ASSISTANT SECRETARY HARTMAN, ON INSTRUCTIONS OF SECRETARY KISSINGER, MET WITH YUGOSLAV OFFICIALS HERE IN WASHINGTON AND IN BELGRADE -- THEIR PURPOSE, TO URGE A PROMPT AND SATISFACTORY RESOLUTION OF THE CASE.

I WILL JUST ALSO MENTION THAT ON INNUMERABLE ADDITIONAL OCCASIONS THE EMBASSY IN BELGRADE AND STATE REPRESENTATIVES HERE KEPT THE MATTER BEFORE THE YUGOSLAV AUTHORITIES IN THE MOST FORCEFUL TERMS. WE HAVE CONSISTENTLY MADE CLEAR THAT THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF THIS GOVERNMENT REGARD MR. TOTH'S CASE AS A SERIOUS OBSTACLE TO THE IMPROVEMENT OF U.S.-YUGOSLAV RELATIONS.

FINALLY, THE SECRETARY HAS BEEN FULLY INFORMED OF THE TOTH CASE AND HAS BEEN CONCERNED AND INVOLVED IN ITS SATIS-

FACTORY RESOLUTION SINCE ITS INCEPTION. DOES THAT ANSWER YOUR QUESTION?

Q: WELL, YOU ANSWER A QUESTION I DIDN'T ASK. I DIDN'T SAY HE WAS REPRIMANDED, AND I DON'T THINK HE DIRECTLY SAID THAT HE WAS -- QUOTE -- "REPRIMANDED." WHAT HE HAS SAID WAS THAT HE WAS ACCUSED OF BEING UNDIPLOMATIC FOR PRESSING THE CASE AS HARD AS HE DID.

THE QUESTION IS THERE SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN -- ALTHOUGH MANY CONTACTS -- THERE SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN SOME CROSS PURPOSES AND HE WAS -- TO GET AWAY FROM THE SPECIFIC LEGAL TERM OF UNCLASSIFIED

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"REPRIMAND" -- HE WAS CRITICIZED BY THIS DEPARTMENT. IS THAT THE CASE?

A: NO, THAT IS NOT ACCURATE AT ALL. THAT IS NOT ACCURATE.

Q: NOT CRITICIZED? IN FACT, THE DEPARTMENT WAS PLEASED WITH THE WAY HE DEALT WITH THE MATTER?

A: THE CHARACTERIZATION OF AMBASSADOR SILBERMAN HAVING BEEN CRITICIZED BY SOME LEVEL OR ANOTHER OF THE

DEPARTMENT IS INACCURATE.

Q: WAS THERE ANY FAULT FOUND WITH THE WAY HE WENT ABOUT THIS?

A: NO. I THINK I HAVE DESCRIBED TO YOU HOW ALL LEVELS OF THE GOVERNMENT COOPERATED AND DID WHAT WAS POSSIBLE UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES TO GAIN MR. TOTH'S RELEASE. AND I THINK YOU HAVE TO BEAR IN MIND THAT HE HAS BEEN RELEASED AND HE IS ON HIS WAY BACK TO THE UNITED STATES, WHICH IS THE OUTCOME OF OUR EFFORTS.

Q: THE IMMOVABLE OBJECT HAS MET THE IRRESISTABLE FORCE. HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THE AMBASSADOR -- WHO HAS BEEN PRAISED FOR THE WAY HE CONDUCTED THIS CASE, WHICH IS WHAT I UNDERSTAND THAT YOU ARE DOING -- FEELING THAT HE WAS CRITICIZED?

A: WHAT I AM SAYING IS THAT WE FEEL AMBASSADOR SILBERMAN DID A GOOD JOB IN KEEPING THE CASE BEFORE THE YUGOSLAVS AND REPRESENTING VERY FORCEFULLY OUR POSITION. A LOT OF OTHER PEOPLE DID TOO, AS I HAVE TRIED TO MAKE PLAIN. I THINK IT WOULD BE VERY INACCURATE TO SAY THAT THERE WAS ANY LACK OF ZEAL OR LACK OF INTEREST ON THE PART OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT IN PUSHING THE TOTH CASE.

Q: WILL THERE BE ANY ACTION BY THE DEPARTMENT AT ANY LEVEL TAKEN NOW AGAINST AMBASSADOR SILBERMAN FOR MAKING STATEMENTS SUCH AS -- QUOTE -- "TO THESE PEOPLE DIPLOMACY IS APPARENTLY THE PASSIVE PURSUIT OF AMERICAN UNCLASSIFIED

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INTERESTS, AND I DON'T ACCEPT THAT"?

A: I HAVEN'T ANY IDEA ON THAT.

Q: IN OTHER WORDS, THAT IS A POSSIBILITY -- THAT THERE COULD BE DISCIPLINARY ACTION TAKEN NOW BECAUSE OF HIS PUBLIC STATEMENTS?

A: I HAVE NO KNOWLEDGE OF ANY KIND OF DISCIPLINARY ACTION.

Q: DID HE VIOLATE ANY RULES, WRITTEN OR OTHERWISE, BY GOING PUBLIC WITH THIS INTERNAL DISPUTE?

A: I DO NOT KNOW WHETHER THERE ARE ANY WRITTEN RULES ON AN AMBASSADOR --

Q: UNWRITTEN?

A: WRITTEN OR UNWRITTEN RULES ON AN AMBASSADOR MAKING A PRESS STATEMENT OR EXPRESSING HIS POINT OF VIEW.

Q: HAVE THE YUGOSLAV AUTHORITIES OR THE YUGOSLAV PRESS
HAD ANY COMMENTS ABOUT AMBASSADOR SILBERMAN'S CONDUCT?

A: NOT THAT I AM AWARE OF.

Q: DO YOU KNOW WHETHER HE IS A CAREER MAN?

A: NO, AMBASSADOR SILBERMAN IS NOT A CAREER FOREIGN
SERVICE OFFICER.

Q: HE'S A FORMER DEPUTY ATTORNEY GENERAL. WHAT WAS HE,
A SPECIAL DEPUTY?

A: I THINK HE WAS A DEPUTY (ATTORNEY GENERAL) YES.

Q: WAS THERE ANY INTERNAL DISPUTE?

A: INTERNAL DISPUTE IN WHAT SENSE?

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Q: DID SILBERMAN SAY WE OUGHT TO MOVE A LITTLE FASTER
AND THE DEPARTMENT EITHER IGNORE HIM OR MOVE SLOWER?

A: I AM NOT INFORMED OF THE GIVE AND TAKE OVER THE LAST
YEAR IN DEVISING OUR POLICY WITH REGARD TO THE TOTH CASE.
I REALLY CANNOT ANSWER THAT. I DO NOT KNOW ABOUT THE
QUESTION OF DISPUTE. CERTAINLY ALTERNATIVES MUST HAVE
BEEN DISCUSSED.

Q: CERTAINLY WHAT THE AMBASSADOR SAYS THEN YOU'RE NOT
CHALLENGING?

A: I REALLY DO NOT WANT TO GET INTO CHALLENGING OR
REFUTING AMBASSADOR SILBERMAN ON THE NUTS AND BOLTS OF
HOW THE CASE WAS HANDLED. I THINK I HAVE REALLY TRIED
TO INDICATE THAT A LOT OF PEOPLE COOPERATED IN WHAT
ULTIMATELY HAS BEEN A SUCCESSFUL EFFORT IN GETTING MR.
TOTH RELEASED, AND I THINK THAT IS THE MAIN POINT WE HAVE
TO BEAR IN MIND.

Q: IS THE SECRETARY OF STATE AMONG THOSE WHO CONSIDER
THAT AMBASSADOR SILBERMAN HAS BEEN DOING A GREAT JOB IN
YUGOSLAVIA?

A: I THINK I HAVE ALREADY ADDRESSED THAT.

Q: I'M ASKING WHETHER THE SECRETARY OF STATE PERSONALLY
HAS SAID THIS.

A: I DO NOT KNOW WHAT THE SECRETARY OF STATE HAS SAID
DIRECTLY TO MR. SILBERMAN, BUT I DO KNOW THAT THE

SECRETARY HAS SUPPORTED THE EFFORTS TO GET MR. TOTH RELEASED, AND HAS BEEN FULLY INFORMED AND DIRECTLY CONCERNED THROUGHOUT.

Q: NO, I MEAN IN THIS COMBINATION WHICH YOU EXPRESSED ABOUT THE FEELINGS OR ABOUT AMBASSADOR SILBERMAN'S CONDUCT, IS THE SECRETARY OF STATE ASSOCIATED PERSONALLY WITH THIS COMMENDATION?

A: I AM SURE HE FEELS THAT THE AMBASSADOR DID A VERY UNCLASSIFIED

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COMPETENT JOB IN, AS I SAY, KEEPING THE CASE BEFORE THE YUGOSLAVS AND PRESSING IT TO A SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION.

Q: THE MAIN OBJECT, GETTING TOTH OUT OF JAIL, IS NOW FULFILLED. DOES THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE PLAN ANY FURTHER ACTION?

A: ACTION WITH REGARD TO WHAT?

Q: WELL, IN REGARD TO THE YUGOSLAVS WHO PUT HIM IN JAIL.

A: NOT THAT I AM AWARE OF. I DO NOT KNOW WHAT ACTION IT WOULD BE POSSIBLE FOR THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT TO TAKE. I DO NOT KNOW OF ANY APPROPRIATE ACTION THAT WE COULD TAKE NOW THAT THE CASE HAS BEEN APPROPRIATELY RESOLVED.

Q: WHY WAS HIS DETENTION, WHEN HE WAS UNDER DETENTION, AN OBSTACLE TO BETTER RELATIONS WITH YUGOSLAVIA -- BECAUSE HE IS AN AMERICAN, OR IS THERE SOMETHING SPECIFIC?

A: IT IS OUR VIEW THAT HE IS AN AMERICAN CITIZEN. OF COURSE, THE YUGOSLAVS DID NOT RECOGNIZE THAT FACT, AND WE WERE NOT GIVEN CONSULAR ACCESS TO HIM. WE FELT THAT THERE WERE NO GROUND FOR HIS BEING HELD. AND I THINK IT MUST BE CLEAR IF THERE WERE FORTY HIGH LEVEL DEMARCHES MADE ON THIS SUBJECT, NOT TO MENTION THE NUMEROUS OTHER ONES DURING THE PERIOD OF ALMOST A YEAR, THIS HAD TO BE A BONE OF CONTENTION BETWEEN THE TWO GOVERNMENTS, WHICH I THINK HAS NOW BEEN RESOLVED.

Q: HAS HE BEEN HELD FOR A YEAR?

A: I THINK IT WAS AUGUST 1975. LET ME CHECK THAT.

Q: ALMOST A YEAR.

A: YES. AUGUST 6 OF LAST YEAR.

Q: JUST SO WE CAN GET OUR DEFINITION OF TERMS RIGHT,

WOULD IT BE CORRECT TO DESCRIBE THESE FORTY HIGH-
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LEVEL CONTACTS AS AMERICAN PROTESTS?

A: NO, I DO NOT THINK YOU WOULD CATEGORIZE ALL FORTY AS
PROTESTS. THERE ARE MANY TIMES, AS YOU KNOW, IN AN
EMBASSY OVERSEAS WHEN YOU GO INTO THE HOST GOVERNMENT AND
MAKE YOUR POSITION CLEAR. NOW, THAT IS NOT A PROTEST.
A PROTEST IS RESERVED FOR VERY STRONG LANGUAGE.

Q: WERE THERE ANY PROTESTS?

A: I DO NOT KNOW WHETHER ANY OF THE HIGH-LEVEL DEMARCHES
COULD BE PROPERLY CLASSIFIED AS -- QUOTE -- PROTESTS --
UNQUOTE.

Q: WHY IS TAKING A PICTURE OF A SUGAR FACTORY CON-
SIDERED ESPIONAGE?

A: THAT IS THE INTERPRETATION OF THE AUTHORITIES IN
YUGOSLAVIA, AND I CERTAINLY WOULD NOT HAZARD A GUESS AS
TO WHY THAT WAS CONSIDERED ESPIONAGE.

Q: DO THEY HAVE ANOTHER CONCEPT OF WHAT HE WAS DOING
THAN INDUSTRIAL --

A: I HAVE NO IDEA.

Q: DID THEY DROP THE CHARGE OR PARDON HIM OR TERMINATE
THE SENTENCE?

A: I UNDERSTAND THAT THEY DECIDED HE WAS NOT A YUGOSLAV
CITIZEN AND THEREFORE COULD BE DEPORTED. THAT IS MY
UNDERSTANDING.

Q: WHERE IS HE NOW?

A: HE IS ON HIS WAY BACK TO THE UNITED STATES. I THINK
HE GETS INTO NEW YORK THIS AFTERNOON AND THEN GOES
IMMEDIATELY TO DENVER. THAT IS HIS HOMETOWN, DENVER.

Q: WHEN DOES HE ACTUALLY LEAVE THE SECURITY OF THE
UNITED STATES OFFICIALS IN YUGOSLAVIA, WHEN HE BOARDS THE
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PLANE? OR IS HE UNDER U.S. OFFICIAL ASSOCIATION OR
SECURITY UNTIL HE ACTUALLY LANDS IN NEW YORK, AND IS A

FREE MAN?

A: YOU DON'T MEAN SECURITY; YOU PROBABLY MEAN PROTECTION. WELL, ONCE HE IS IN AN AIRPLANE TRAVELING OVER INTERNATIONAL TERRITORY, IF HE IS TRAVELING BY AN AMERICAN CARRIER, I PRESUME THAT IT WOULD BE CONSIDERED UNDER AMERICAN AUSPICES, BUT I DOUBT VERY MUCH THAT HE HAS ANY KIND OF SPECIAL SECURITY ONCE HE GETS ON BOARD THAT AIRPLANE.

Q: DO YOU HAVE ANY MORE DETAILS ON HIS ARRIVAL IN NEW YORK?

A: I DO NOT. I DON'T HAVE A TIME. HE IS ARRIVING IN NEW YORK THIS AFTERNOON AND GOES IMMEDIATELY TO DENVER. ARRIVAL IN DENVER AT 6:50 -- THAT MUST BE DENVER TIME -- IN THE EVENING. YES, IT IS LOCAL TIME.

Q: I HAVE ONE MORE QUESTION ABOUT THE TOTH AFFAIR. YOU SAID THERE HAD BEEN HIGH-LEVEL CONTACTS AND THAT THERE HAD BEEN HIGH-LEVEL SUPPORT FOR THE EFFORTS TO RELEASE HIM.

A: YES.

Q: AMBASSADOR SILBERMAN AGREES THAT THIS IS THE CASE, ACCORDING TO ACCOUNTS FROM THERE WHAT HE SAYS, AND YOU HAVEN'T ADDRESSED HERE, IS THAT THE MIDDLE LEVEL OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT BUREAUCRACY, SPECIFICALLY THE EAST EUROPEAN DESK, IN FACT OPPOSED HIS EFFORTS AND -- TO USE YOUR EARLIER WORD -- "ASKED KISSINGER TO REPRIMAND HIM FOR HIS INSISTENT EFFORTS." IS THAT TRUE?

A: THAT IS NOT TRUE. ROBINSON

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